Salisbury University
Nabb Research Center
Since 1982
for Delmarva History and Culture
We're History...Without You!

Shoreline

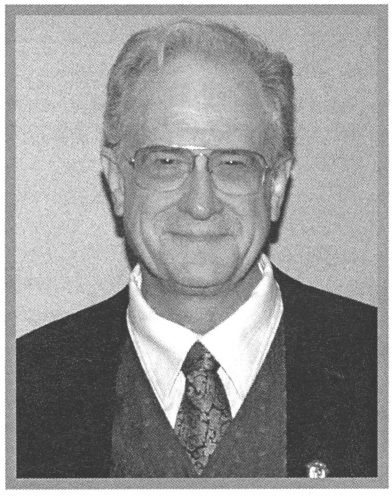
Vol. 17, No. 7 • September/October 2010

For the Members of the Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture at Salisbury University

In A Word ...

By Nabb Research Center Director G. Ray Thompson, Ph.D.

What an exciting fall we have planned for all of you! We've been working diligently here at the Nabb Center on a series of exhibits showcasing various facets of Delmarva's history and culture. First we have an exhibit, "Faces of th Eastern Shore," that will fascinate those of you who are passionate about the unique character of Delmarva residents. Chosen from our own photograph and portrait collections, and from those of Eastern Shore families, the exhibit allows us to step back and look into the faces of some well-known Delmarvans as well as some not-so-well-known. A second exhibit, that opened in early September, is "Native Americans and First Contact on Delmarva,"

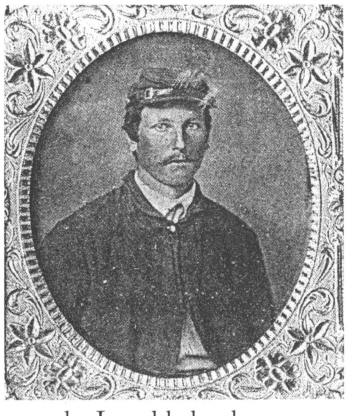


which remains up through May 2011. In late October we will curate "'Tis the Season: Vintage Postcards in American Memory," concentrating on the fall and winter holidays—Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year. We hope you will come see each of these exhibits.

Also, this *Shoreline* features a review of the popular exhibit "Sources of Black Community: Family and Faith" and a taste of the rich and varied programs and events we've planned for you for the fall. Please join us for as many of the events celebrating unique facets of Delmarva history as you can. You won't be sorry!

Faces of the Eastern Shore

By Rachael Stone



Our current exhibit, "Faces of the Eastern Shore," was inspired by Scorchy Tawes' WBOC-News *Wandering our Delmarvalous Land*, a short film that provides a glimpse of life from the viewpoint of an Eastern Shoreman. As Mr. Tawes frankly remarked, "Eastern Shoremen are a breed unto themselves." Known for being people of the water and people of the land, the men and women of Delmarva featured in this exhibit illustrate the way of life and legacy of people of the region. The display of portraits, photographs and sculpture captures the characters of these individuals and families, telling their stories through their faces.

If you are from outside the region, as I am, the exhibit paints a vivid picture of the rich culture and lifestyle on this side of the bridge. Some of the people displayed practiced their trades on land or water, some were soldiers, some were statesmen, and some were just ordinary people. I could clearly see their hard work, dedication, independence and can-do attitude shining brightly in their eyes.

I respect and admire the close-knit communities, the local pride and the importance of family evident in the exhibit. Never having had the chance to meet some of my ancestors, I was touched and delighted to see these strings of generations and tradition. Everyone has a unique story that sets him or her apart from everyone else—those are the stories I love to hear.

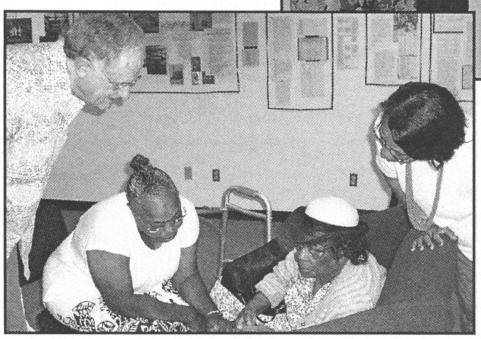
Curated by Nabb Volunteer Coordinator Patricia J. Taylor, who has long dreamed of mounting such an exhibit, "Faces of the Eastern Shore" is sure to excite viewers.

Rachael Stone is a communication arts student intern, working with the Nabb Research Center.

A Review of 'Sources of Black Community: Family and Faith'

By Ursula Ehrhardt

Ernestine Harris Cephas, Rulene Molok, Vivian Pinder Jackson and Oneda Jackson Jones, who visited in July, stand alongside portraits of ancestors and family members.



Director Ray Thompson and Vivian Pinder Jackson look on as Rulene and Hazel Molok pore through family documents.

Ernestine Harris Cephas concentrates on the story of the Pollitt family.

"Sources of Black Community: Family and Faith" was one of the Nabb Center's first exhibits in our new gallery space, having opened January 16, and has been our most popular exhibit to date. Although it was scheduled to close at the end of February, we had requests to keep it open through the spring semester, and we were delighted to do so. In May, we received additional requests to keep it open so that people returning to the Eastern Shore for traditional June and July family reunions might view the exhibit. We were pleased to see reunion attendees and seasonal tourists alike visit the gallery in the exhibit's closing days. Co-curated by board member L. Paul Morris Jr., this exhibit has been written about, filmed, reported on and reviewed more than any other featured Nabb Center exhibits. Included below is a review, written by Salisbury University Professor Ursula Erhardt in the closing weeks of the exhibit, that we are proud to reproduce in this issue of the Shoreline.

In 1838, well before the Civil War (1861-65), five African-American men purchased a parcel of land to build a Methodist church in Salisbury. Known as "Hill Church" or "Church on the Hill," it was later incorporated as the John Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church and enlarged to two stories. Now the site of the Charles H. Chipman Cultural Center, it stands on Broad Street, near the intersection of Routes 13 and 50. Only one of the five founders, Elijah Pinkett, was born a free black man; the others—Levin Huston, George Pollitt, Major (Micajah) Toadvine and George James—had all been born into slavery and later "manumitted" or legally freed.

"Sources of Black Community: Family and Faith," an exhibition organized by Salisbury University's Edward H. Nabb Research Center for Delmarva History and Culture, documents the intersection of local black history with Methodism, both in religion and education, by charting the lives of these five African Americans and some of their descendants, as well as the histories of numerous other prominent black families from the lower Eastern Shore. These include the Waters family of Puncheon Landing in Somerset County; the Fassett, Henry and Tindley families of Worcester County; and the Molock family of Dorchester County.

The exhibition also gives visitors an insight into the practice of local history, especially genealogy, by displaying the extraordinary range of documents (mostly in facsimile) that the researchers used in assembling information about these various African-American families.

Levin Huston (1794-1871), for example, was born a slave on the Poplar Hill plantation. His name is listed in several documents, including an 1828 inventory of his master, Dr. John Huston; a deed of manumission signed by Dr. Huston's widow, Sarah, in 1829; and the 1838 deed in the Worcester County land records that lists him as one of the five purchasers of the land for the Methodist church. The deed was recorded in Worcester County because Salisbury, at that time, straddled Worcester and Somerset counties. Wicomico County was later created from these two counties in 1867.

Another document is a bill of sale that shows that Levin, described as a "free Colored man," purchased his wife, Easter, and daughter, Eliza Hester, from their master, George Parsons, in 1849 (20 years after he had been manumitted). Parsons lists the price ($550), specifies the women's family relationship to Levin Huston, and states that both "negro women have been heretofore owned and possessed held & used as my own lawful property up to this present time." Levin then manumitted his wife and daughter in 1850, as shown in two further documents. Also on display are Levin Huston's will and an inventory of his possessions at the time of his death in 1871.

Of the six children of Levin and Easter (or Esther) Huston, the exhibition focuses on two: Solomon (1824-1910) and Levin Delano (L.D.) (1830-1910) Houston. Solomon (or Saul), who was also listed in Dr. John Huston's 1828 inventory, was sold in 1852 to the doctor's daughter, Sally, and then manumitted by her in 1855. Described in his obituary as a leader in social, financial,

political, religious and educational affairs, he served for many years as chairman of the board of trustees of the church co-founded by his father and was a director of Morgan College (now Morgan State University) in Baltimore.

L.D. Houston lived a life of adventure, as recounted in the 1904 publication, *Commanders of the Dining Room: Biographical Sketches and Portraits of Successful Headwaiters*. As a boy, he served on Mississippi River steamboats. Eventually escaping to Mexico, Houston made his way to Europe and from there to California via London and South America. He then moved to China, where he was employed as a steward on Chinese riverboats. Returning to the United States after the Civil War, he settled in New York City, where he worked as a hotel headwaiter (with the exception of summers when he worked at various resorts).

Among the records pertaining to George Pollitt (1794-1850), one of the aforementioned founders of the John Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church, is the entry of his birth in the family Bible of his white owner, William Pollitt (1756-1816) of Worcester County. The actual Bible is on display in a case nearby. William Pollitt devoted an entire page in his family's Bible to the names and birth dates of the children of his slaves, Titus Frost, and his wife, Rachel. William eventually freed Titus and Rachel in his will, but his other slaves were either sold or divided among his heirs. George remained with William Pollitt's widow, Sarah, who then manumitted him in 1831. Other Pollitt family documents refer to Frost Pollitt (1789-1872), the older brother of George, who became a well-known Methodist preacher, and to Frost's son, Charles (1817-1908), who was also a minister.

A particularly interesting set of documents concerns the Fassett family of Worcester County; specifically, four brothers who were manumitted by their owner, Sarah Bruff, so that they could serve in the United States Colored Troops (USCT) of the Union Army. In return, Sarah received $300 in compensation for each former slave. The four brothers, initially named Bruff after the plantation where their mother lived, later took the last name of their father, who lived on the nearby James Fassett plantation.

This is only a sample of the many family histories in this extraordinary exhibition, which not only traces the importance of religion (especially the Methodist church) in the lives of African Americans, but also shows how varied and complex the institution of slavery was. Above all, it documents the resourcefulness and resilience of African Americans in maintaining their families and building their communities.

Count on at least an hour to do this exhibition justice, and wear comfortable shoes. There's an enormous amount of material here to pore over and absorb.

Professor Ursula M. Erhardt teaches art history at Salisbury University.

Editor's note: An adaption of this article previously appeared in *The Daily Times*. Reprinted here with the permission of the author.

News, Exhibits and Events

The Salisbury University Cultural Laureate Program (CLP) was created to encourage students to attend cultural events on campus. This semester, the Nabb Research Center is proud to host three events selected by the CLP to be a part of this laudable initiative. The first, "Slave Castles of Ghana: A Discussion" with Salisbury University's Tonya Price and George Washington University's Lee Ann Fujii, examines the experiences of two scholars who visited the historic prisons from which slaves were shipped to the New World. The second, "African-American Traditions in Voice: Slave Spirituals and Gospel Music," is a concert featuring an Eastern Shore troupe of historic re-enactors of slave spirituals and the university's own gospel choir. The third, "Rebel Heels and Northern Scum: Maryland's Role in the Civil War," with historian Thomas Clemens, traces Maryland's role in the Civil War from beginning to end. All of the events (see listings, that follow) will provide cultural and historical perspective to students and visitors alike.

The Nabb Center is pleased to announce that one of the books about which we are most often asked, *The Littleton Heritage: Some American Descendants of Col. Nathaniel Littleton (1605-1654) of Northampton Co., Virginia, and His Royal Forebears*, is now also available online. Originally published in 1997, it provides detailed information about the many branches of the Littleton family tree, including the Whittington, Long, Roach, Bell, Wilson, Savage, Waters, Eyre, Tazewell, Robins, Denwood, Gilliss, Winder, Fassitt, Tingle and Purnell families. Hard copies may still be purchased; please contact the Nabb Center for more information.

Do You Remember Main Street?

The Nabb Center will soon begin developing an exhibit that will explore and celebrate the history of Salisbury's Main Street. We will also be devoting one of our biannual issues of the Shoreline to the Main Streets of Delmarva and would love to hear from our members and readers about their own "Eastern Shore Main Street." If you would like to write an article on Delmarva's Main Streets, or have photographs or memorabilia related to our Main Streets that you would like to share, we would love to hear from you.

Exhibits, Fall 2010

Nabb Center Galleries, Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1-4 p.m.
or by appointment

Native Americans and First Contact on Delmarva
August 30, 2010-May 20, 2011
The first contact with Europeans brought profound change for Native Americans and the landscape. Maps, artifacts and documents reveal the early period of exploration by Europeans and illustrate their subsequent domination of the Eastern Shore.

Faces of the Eastern Shore
August 30-October 22
The people of the Eastern Shore have been described as independent cusses with a fierce local pride. See some of the faces that exemplify the character of the people of Delmarva, showing their spirit, way of life and legacy.

'Tis the Season: Vintage Postcards in American Memory
November 1, 2010-February 1, 2011
Vintage postcards intrigue and amaze with the variety, sense of humor, and insight they provide into the minds of the late Victorians. From the Nabb Research Center Collections, this exhibit features cards of the fall and winter holidays—Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas and the New Year. Sometimes somber, often sentimental and frequently irreverent, these delightful cards reflect the mood of the holidays, and of the era.

Commemorate the Great Fire of Salisbury
213 W. Main St., Downtown City Center Building
October 14-16
FireFest 2010 is coming! The Nabb Center, in conjunction with Urban Salisbury, the City of Salisbury and the Salisbury Fire Department, commemorates the 124th anniversary of the greatest cataclysm to hit Salisbury—the Great Fire of 1886.

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Public Programs, Fall 2010

Kin & Sin: Early Settlers of the Eastern Shore, with Vaughn Baker
Lecture, Nabb Center Gallery
Thursday, September 30, 7 p.m.
Investigating alliances and networking among families opens new doors to discovering the earliest Chesapeake settlers and their interconnectedness. Vaughn Baker discusses the importance of family connections to the development of the earliest Eastern Shore settlements.

Telling Your Story: A Gift to Those You Love, with Joan Katz
Workshop, Nabb Center Gallery
Saturday, October 2, 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Memories, photos, keepsakes, and public and private data help write your legacy. Historian and educator Joan Katz leads this day-long workshop on writing your memoirs. $25 per person; please bring a notebook and pencil (or laptop computer) and a bag lunch. Call 410-543-6312 for reservations; class size will be small and seating is limited.

The Devil Is in the Details: Politics, Mapping of Delmarva and the John Smith Chesapeake Trail, with Dr. Michael Scott
Lecture, Nabb Center Gallery
Thursday, October 14, 7 p.m.
Professor Michael Scott, of SU's Geography and Geosciences Department, discusses his work on pinpointing Capt. John Smith's route through the Chesapeake Bay and up the Nanticoke River.

Slave Castles of Ghana: A Discussion, with Salisbury University's Tonya Price and George Washington University's Lee Ann Fujii
Lecture, Nabb Center Gallery
Wednesday, October 27, 7 p.m.
Located on the west coast of Africa, Ghana was the home to ports where great slave castles held thousands of Africans destined for the new world. Price and Fujii discuss their journeys to the area.

African-American Traditions in Voice: Slave Spirituals and Gospel Music
Concert, Wicomico Room, Guerrieri University Center
Friday, October 29, 7 p.m.
Experience African-American music traditions and learn about their histories. Featuring the Society for the Preservation of African-American Arts singers and the SU Gospel Choir.

Rebel Heels and Northern Scum: Maryland's Role in the Civil War, with Dr. Thomas Clemens
Lecture, Wicomico Room, Guerrieri University Center
Thursday, November 4, 7 p.m.
Historian Thomas G. Clemens highlights Maryland's pivotal role in our nation's most tragic conflict. This program is made possible by the Maryland Humanities Council.

African-American Churches of the Eastern Shore, with Linda Duyer
Lecture, Nabb Center Gallery
Wednesday December 8, 7 p.m.
Author and local historian Linda Duyer discusses vanished and surviving African-American churches of the Eastern Shore.